

10.11.18 - BEGINNINGS, 2010
Oil on canvas, 230 x 195 cm

Anne Pontégnie

2009
2019

Thinking in Paint



YVES ZURSTRASSEN

09.06.12, 2009
Oil on marouflaged canvas on wood, 12 x 25 cm

Yves Zurstrassen's oeuvre is at once clear and baffling. His language is that of an abstraction that combines gesture and pattern, based on the formal processes that define its composition. The result is painting that is direct, lively and legible, but that evades us at the same time as it manifests itself.

Zurstrassen belongs to a generation of painters, on both sides of the Atlantic, who, in the late 1970s, were able to free themselves from the modernist constraint of radical invention for perhaps more modest, yet freer projects. Once the idea of the tabula rasa was discarded, the visual inventions of the 20th century became accessible in order to elaborate a singular language that went beyond schools, styles or chapels. Günther Förg, Bernard

Frize or Christian Bonnefoi in Europe, and Terry Winters, David Reed, Jonathan Lasker or Philip Taaffe in the United States, are just some of the artists of Zurstrassen's generation who, like him, have linked process and expression, pattern and gesture, concept and form.

Perhaps because he is self-taught, perhaps because he has always lived far from the main centres of creation, Yves Zurstrassen has preserved an independence that has allowed him to develop an oeuvre that never reads better than from the manner in which it progresses. The decade that preceded 2019 expresses this by way of extensive series of works, interrupted by moments of dropping out, encompassing the necessary breathing time before every new invention.



10.12.08 — ZIGZAG, 2010
Oil on canvas, 300 x 360 cm

The year 2009 marked a temporary abandonment of colour. Zurstrassen's palette was reduced to whites, blacks, greys and earth tones. Grand, ample gestures pace the composition in more or less dense curlicues, on which patterns of cut-out paper are superimposed, characteristic of his visual method.

These are printed on very thin paper, before being cut mechanically. They are then placed on an initial background, then covered by successive coats of paint before being delicately removed once the painting is complete, in the manner of a sophisticated stencil. This process enabled Zurstrassen to introduce a temporality in which the various stages appear in inverted order. The patterns seem to superimpose themselves,

whereas in reality they also reveal visual moments left in the background, held in reserve, as it were. These unearthed forms, insofar as they existed prior to the visual gesture, were moreover produced using a computer, a printer, then a machine: a digital cutter. These contribute to complicating the expressiveness of the gesture by confronting it with the programmatic distance of the cutting. The superimposition of both creates a game in which the rhythmical repetition of patterns punctuates the smooth motion of the gesture.

YVES ZURSTRASSEN



11.04.07, 2011
Oil on canvas, 125 x 175 cm

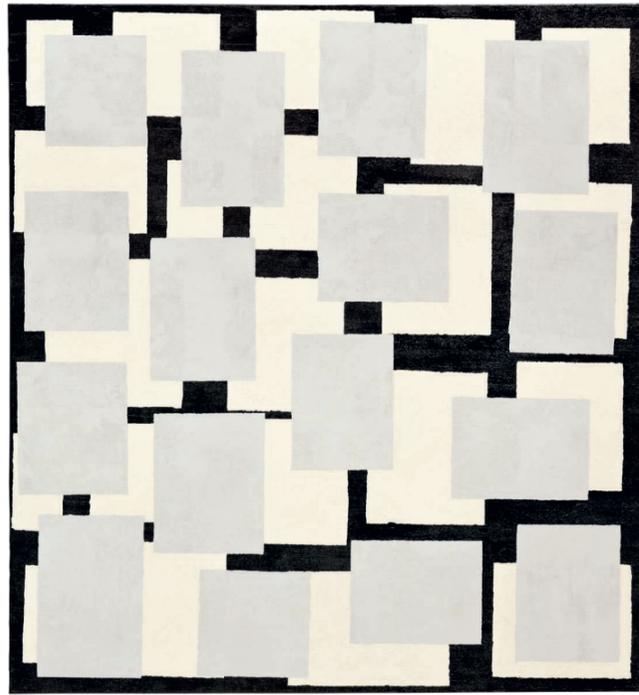


13.09.18, 2013
Oil on canvas, 190 x 190 cm

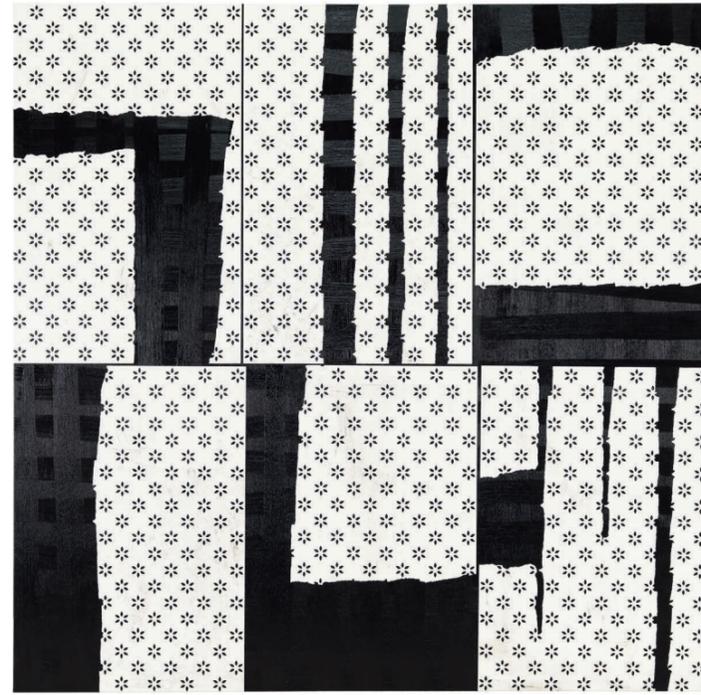
For the next two years, Zurstrassen scarcely expanded this palette, and instead broke the gesture/pattern dichotomy by using shapes — approximative squares — and shorter, dryer movements. The space of the image became progressively saturated, with the successive stages barely discernible behind a screen of material and raw paint. Paradoxically, this suffocation of the background by the surface opened the door to a reversal that would prove crucial to his following series.

During the course of 2013, the papers were no longer cut out in patterns, but the pattern cut in the sheet; it is smaller, and it recurs, as on wallpaper. The background is painted sienna in a few broad movements, then covered with a thicker, regular layer that can be

either white or black. This is then papered over with large sheets of openwork paper. When the background is white, the surface is then entirely papered with black, and with white when the background is black. The paper is then removed to create an optical and visual play in which composition and process blend together (see the illustration of the process). Zurstrassen had thus added another step to his process. The gestural phase is now only perceptible through the patterns, while the openwork papers form an overall background that introduces a minimalist dimension reminiscent of previous moments in his oeuvre.



03.03.07, 2003
Oil on canvas, 195 x 180 cm



14.01.30 - PATTERN PAINTING, 2014
Oil on canvas, 225 x 225 cm

From 2003 onward, in a to-and-fro movement that is characteristic of Zurstrassen's way of evolving his visual language, we find paintings whose geometry and play on black and white anticipate the series that are still ongoing.

Large, almost childlike graphic forms initially oppose spontaneity and colour to the process, until Zurstrassen concentrates only on the potentialities offered by the large papers. The starting point of the paintings remains the same, but at the final stage — consisting of tracing forms on the surface with a brush — substitutes partial tearing of the large paper sheets. The violence of the gesture is legible through the irregularity of the edges of the sheets. The opposition between the

regularity of the visual gesture that evenly covers the painting and the spontaneity of the gesture of the hand tearing the paper allows the artist to juxtapose another play of positive/negative to the chromatic play of black and white. In the face of this complexity, the eye 'knows not where to begin' and is lost in a game of pretence in which the background rises to the surface and what is added is really what is lacking. In this series, the artist has reached a transient stability that allows the paintings to engage in dialogue with one another along the modulations that make them more profound.



16.03.02 - SUMMERTIME, 2016
Oil on canvas, 150 x 150 cm



16.12.16 - SUNNY DAY, 2016
Oil on canvas, 220 x 195 cm

YVES ZURSTRASSEN

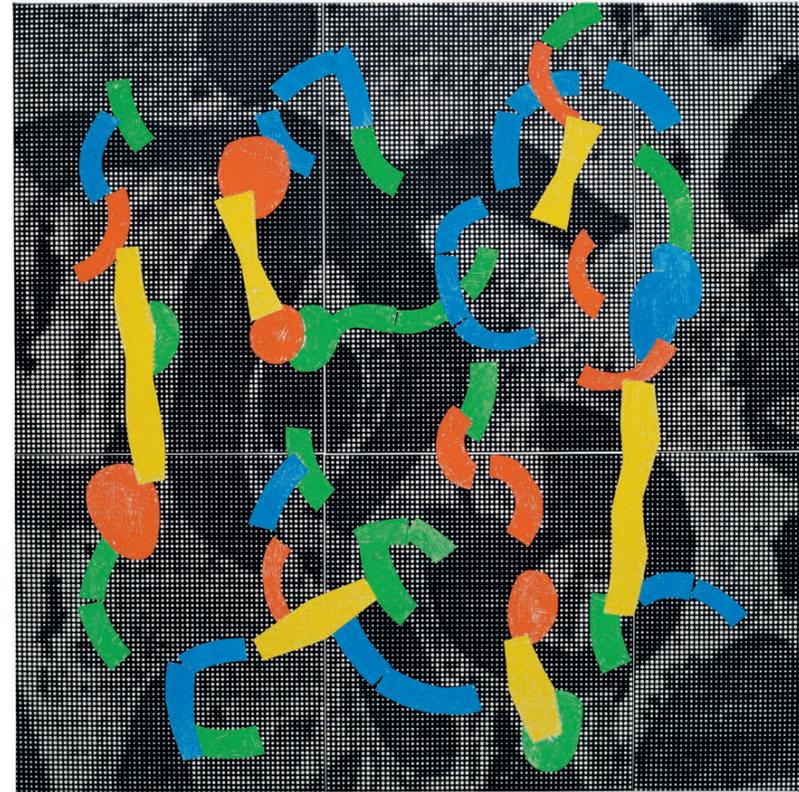
The two years that followed were marked by more heterogeneous experiments. *Summertime* epitomizes a moment of conflagration. We find the bold gesture of 2010, the reserved patterns reminiscent of 2009, and newer, more organic forms in a palette enriched with softer hues. These forms result from a new orientation from the cut-out papers. This time, the cutting is done by hand, which confers the papers a blurrier, more gestural dimension. They are then coated with paint before being applied to the painting, then removed, leaving a coloured imprint structured by the gesture of detachment.

Yves Zurstrassen will now fully commit to the exploration of the potentialities opened by this process. He starts by overlapping the two methods — reserve and

detachment — by superimposing them to the saturation point, in dense and dancing compositions.



17.08.14 – NIGHT AND DAY, 2017
Oil on canvas, 100 x 80 cm

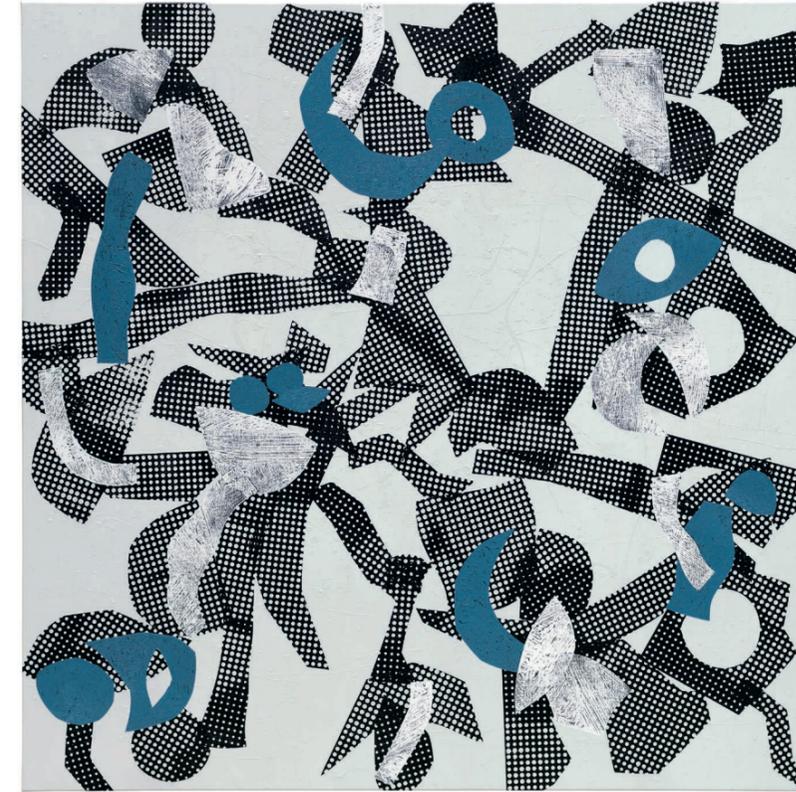


17.11.08 – ÉMERGENCE, 2017
Oil on canvas, 180 x 180 cm

The series that ends this decade of visual evolutions synthesizes the two previous series by adding another dimension: the image. Yves Zurstrassen picks up the system of the large stencil sheets, replacing the repetition of the decorative pattern by reproducing a detail of a former painting. Photographed, enlarged, then perforated in the paper, the painting becomes its own ghost image. The background is divided in four or six segments, depending on the number of sheets used, and a slight gap remains visible. They are placed on a black background, then completely coated in white before being removed to reveal the image. This method allows the artist to integrate previous series into another stage of his work, thus making visible an internal coherence that

would otherwise be difficult to access. The black and grey backgrounds are sometimes animated by detached forms, or by an association of *décollage* and *reserve*. Saturation gives way to airier compositions to increase the play between the movement of the reproduced forms and that of the added forms. The backgrounds appear as though awakened by very specific blues, greens, yellows and oranges — at once vibrant and blurry — of the superimposed forms.

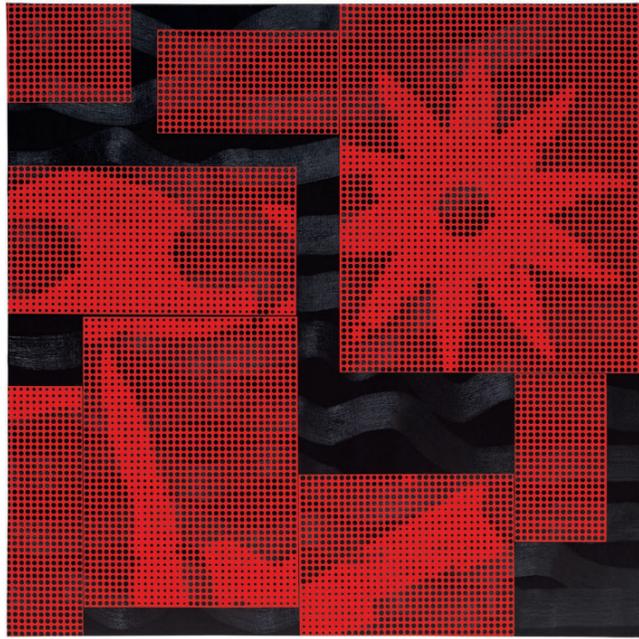
YVES ZURSTRASSEN



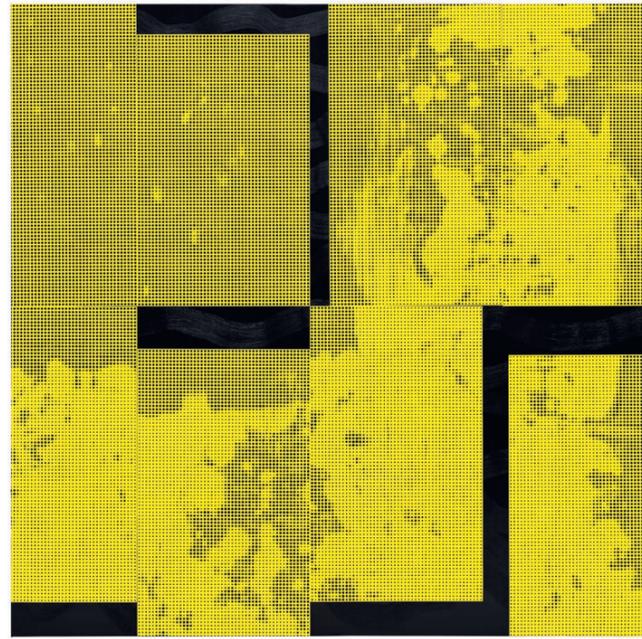
18.02.26 – MOONLIGHT, 2018
Oil on canvas, 190 x 190 cm

Building on this progress, Zurstrassen will go on to exploit the parallel trajectory of image and colour by advancing both towards a more sober language. Where colour is concerned, the artist returns to airier compositions that evoke his works from 2009. With *Moonlight* for example, a coat of petrol blue is covered with perforated and hand-cut stencils before being entirely painted in putty grey. Once the stencils are removed, Zurstrassen adds the imprints of full shapes — approximative squares, triangles or semi-circles — that cover the petrol blue with the already-applied grey, or with burnt orange, bringing contrast to the composition. The blank spaces and imprints seem to dance in a contradictory movement, running beyond the frame. Conversely, in his images,

the artist develops more static compositions structured by the regularity of the perforated paper sheets. The slight gap between the sheets is expanded to show the movements animating the background. The horizontal and vertical offsets between the sheets structure the composition. Only two colours are used, that of the background and that which covers the perforated sheets. This time, the play of harmonies has been replaced by strong contrasts between the red and grey, the black and lemon yellow. Like rising memories, the forms of the past reappear on the surface



18.07.20 – FOND ROUGE, 2018
Oil on canvas, 150 x 150 cm



19.04.30 – FOND JAUNE, 2019
Oil on canvas, 250 x 250 cm

Yves Zurstrassen does not often leave his studio. He is careful to preserve his universe, where he can explore his visual language in order to better renew it. Like other artists of his generation, he endlessly pushes the physical potential of the paint, to keep it alive and connected to a world that it does not represent, yet whose spirit it captures. His oeuvre evolves in series, by comebacks and new inventions. One needs to understand the meanderings to access the complexity that underlies it without revealing itself.



11.11.10 – CONSTELLATION, 2011
Oil on canvas, 190 x 190 cm